Palm Sunday in the Passion of Our Lord
Cycle A - 4.9.17
Isaiah 50:4-7/Philippians 2:6-11/
Matthew 26:14-27:66

RECEIVING THE TEXT; WRITING THE COMMENTARY

A wise sage once said: The first half of life provides our text; in the second half of life we write the commentary. The Passion according to Matthew which is given to us to cherish at the beginning of this Holy Week, presents us with the last days of our Savior. Unlike the fullness of life we normally associate with reaching a ripe old age, his was a brief flame that flickered and was quickly extinguished. The text of Christ’s life was only thirty years, but the commentary that he provided through his passion and death have inspired us and all believers to hear this profound story for two thousand years again and again. In hearing it, we are invited to become disciples.

The wisdom that Jesus learned from his faithfulness to God throughout his life is made evident in Matthew’s telling of the passion. Unlike the other gospel writers, Matthew’s portrayal clearly demonstrates that Jesus is the central actor in the drama of his passion and death. The disciples and the others in our story respond to Jesus as he fulfills the plan of God the Father. So much is Jesus in control of events and his own self-offering -- determined to write his own commentary -- that Matthew tells us Jesus refuses to drink the wine mixed with gall. That liquid would have deadened the pain as he hung on the cross; but Our Lord would have none of it. His spirit would not be taken from him. He would give it up freely and knowingly.

Jesus proved he was master of his own life, not by making himself the center of it, but by deliberately choosing to let his Father be its center, to be his guide, to assure him of ultimate victory. Throughout Lent we’ve held the words and example of Jesus before us, the One who proved he had only one purpose in life: to live passionately dedicated to doing God’s will. At the end, he again proved master of his own life. When abandoned by his closest friends, he did not abandon the will of God. When beaten and crowned with thorns, when crucified, he continued to be the same patient, loving, hope-filled person he was every day of his life. He retained mastery of his heart and his decisions in the time of greatest temptation to weaken, to give in, to retaliate, to despair, to give up on God.

The story that we share and cherish today is like precious oil. We will carry it with us carefully throughout this Holy Week, and as we return here to pray together on Holy Thursday evening and Good Friday afternoon and at the Easter Vigil. More
importantly, however, this story needs to become a part of the text and commentary of our own lives. Where anger flares up, we need the forgiveness that Jesus so readily extended to his enemies. When anxiety threatens our self-composure, we need the inner peace that Jesus knew in the midst of his trial. When fear or exhaustion distract us from our goals, we need the resolute determination with which Christ faced his journey to Jerusalem. When false accusations or the cruelties of others burden our hearts, we need the tranquility and mercy of the innocent Christ toward those who maltreat us.

For those of you who are children the Passion of Jesus can stir your efforts to be the best person you can be, using all your energy and creativity to set your goals high and to make a difference in this world, to shout your Hosannas with enthusiasm. For those of you in midlife, the Passion of Christ helps you stay on course, to carry out the will of God each day in spite of setbacks and challenges. For those of you in the twilight years of life, writing the commentary of your lives, the Passion of Jesus affirms your very identity as you share in his own suffering and cross.

The God who dreamed you into existence still envisions a future for you. Jesus proved himself not the victim of circumstances, but master of his fate. In all his words and works he fulfilled God’s will. His life was cut short, its text was brief, the commentary fleeting -- the time from the garden of Gethsemane to the grave. It is we, who name this week as *holy*, who must complete Jesus’ commentary by our lives. It is we who know the forgiveness and healing of Our Lord’s passion who must now passionately proclaim the gospel as a means of grace and peace for our world. May these holy days give you and me the grace to receive the text of Jesus’ passion as our own and to write our commentary well.

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